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ABSTRACT

The present report describes the results of an evaluation study of the first course in the new Women's Studies program at the University of Minnesota and the resistance of the teaching assistants for the course to the evaluation. A hypothesis to explain this resistance is that an outside evaluator may face inherent difficulties in evaluating new social-political curricula such as women's studies because of the understandable suspiciousness of students, to which Grier and Cobbs' (1968) term "cultural paranoia" has been applied. Suggestions are offered to future evaluators of the social-political curricula that may help lessen this "paranoia." (Author)

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Method

At the request of the Women's Studies department in 1973, Measurement Services Center of the University of Illinois at Chicago to do a study of the first course of the new Women's Studies program. The goal of this study was to estimate the impact of the first course and to discover the backgrounds, interests, and women's movement of these students.

In this study, three questionnaires were used. The Feminist Questionnaire, was an attitude scale developed by the assistants for the course, unknown to the MSC until the first day of class. The authors composed two additional questionnaires. Questionnaire 1, given in class at the end of the semester. Questionnaire 2, administered in small group sessions by the assistants during the last week of class. These two questionnaires provided information, tapped attitudes toward the role of women in society, and evaluate the course.

Data Source

The three questionnaires described above provided the source of data on student attitudes toward women and men. The authors' and instructor's observations of student behavior and assistants for the course provided information on student behavior.

Results and Conclusions

The results from the questionnaires revealed that 97% of whom were women, were highly interested in the course.

movement. Furthermore, most did not agree with the roles that have been assigned to women. Specifically, the following: children are necessary for men; men are less decisive and more nurturing than women; men come before his wife's, women should adhere to a double standard of sexual morality, and the need for an institution for rearing children. Students wanted marriage, relaxation of sex roles, equal pay, less demand, and day care centers for working women.

Only 53% of the students completed the questionnaire. I am uncertain whether the results obtained were representative of the total group of students. This may have occurred because of the suspiciousness of outside evaluation of women's studies by the faculty, "cultural paranoia." Both the authors and I were present throughout the study, but it became apparent that the teaching assistants ignored instructions during the last weekly small group meeting. Only 53% completed questionnaires and realized this too late, and it was too late to readminister the questionnaire.

It should be noted, however, that the faculty and staff members from the Women's Center were cooperative and facilitated the study.

Educational Importance of the Study

One important aspect of the study described here is the data attitudes toward the role of women and student reaction to the first Studies course at the University of Minnesota. Of wider importance is the examination of the special problems in evaluating what we have called social-political curricula. We have hypothesized a special sensitivity for those involved in such programs, to which sensitivity we have applied and Cobbs' term "cultural paranoia." It is important to take account of the natural attitude of group members who have had to struggle for the success of their respective curricula. Researchers must design any evaluation to overcome the resistance to evaluation that "cultural paranoia"

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